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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the use of dance as an ethnological tool to introduce various cultures in a style that is informative, exciting, and memorable. The kinesthetic aspect reinforces learning outcomes and also relies on the visual and audio components for learning objectives. Practical application is introduced and learning through the kinesthetic sense is discussed. Use of visual aids reinforces the material, and lectures based on history, culture, and dance, and sometimes other art forms are presented in an easy-to-follow format. The experience culminates in a game-playing activity that assesses student comprehension while reinforcing learning objectives. For example, in the public schools throughout Chicago's (Illinois) inner city, the author/educator successfully used African-Caribbean-Brazilian dance in classrooms that impacted thousands of at-risk minority children during the 1990s. A brief history of the African presence in this country was discussed, several pictures were shown of life in some African villages, and a dance was taught that combined their roots into the present culture. Stories from African cultures were told, and the particular musical form was played. Students and teachers took great pride in the ownership of these dances which transcend culture to culture. Often, these dances were tied into the social studies curriculum or as an enhancement. Frequently, these experiences culminated in a performance for the entire school and/or the community, which fostered self-pride in accomplishment. (Author/BT)

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DANCE:
ENHANCING MULTICULTURAL STUDIES OF VARIOUS MINORITY GROUPS

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Dance: Enhancing Multicultural Studies of Various Minority Groups

ABSTRACT

This presentation focuses on the use of dance as an ethnological tool to introduce various cultures in a style that is informative, exciting, and memorable. The kinesthetic aspect reinforces learning outcomes and also relies on the visual and audio components for learning objectives.

Practical application is introduced and learning through the kinesthetic sense is demonstrated. Use of visual aids strongly reinforces the material, and lectures based on history, culture, and dance and sometimes other art forms are presented in an easy-to-follow format. The experience culminates in a game-playing activity which assesses student comprehension while reinforcing learning objectives.

For example, as a dance artist formerly in the public schools throughout Chicago's inner city, African-Caribbean-Brazilian was successfully used in classrooms that impacted thousands of at-risk minority children during the 1990s. A brief history of the African presence in this country was discussed, several pictures shown of life in some African villages, and a dance was taught which combined their roots into the present culture. Stories from African cultures are told, and the particular musical form is listened. Students and teachers take great delight and pride in the ownership of these dances which transcend culture to culture. Often, these dance experiences were tied into the social studies curriculum or as an enhancement thereof. Quite often, these experiences culminated in a performance for the school and/or the community which fostered self pride in accomplishment.

INTRODUCTION

"Knowledge is power." This Pauline statement (The NIV Study Bible) was demonstrated over and over again during the seven years that I worked as a dance artist for an arts agency in Chicago [1] that placed current artists in the public and private schools. Chicago area artists gave thousands of minority, inner-city, and at-risk children many memorable experiences that they otherwise had no other means to obtain. These creative experiences through the arts broadened their scope of understanding, educated them in the particular medium, increased their self-esteem, and presented them with hours of enjoyment, satisfaction, and joy of learning.

Materials

Recent studies through Harvard University (Gardner, 1983) have shown how arts education enhances and increases a student's intellectual capacity. As a dance artist, I chose to use both creative movement (Gough, 2000) and multicultural dance (Lidster and Tamburini, 1965) with the African-American and Hispanic school-

[1] The arts agency that I worked with was Urban Gateways: The Center for Arts in Education. Located in downtown Chicago, this agency contracted 250 to 300 current artists a year from all disciplines and booked us in both public and private schools in the city and surrounding suburbs. Their methodology for arts education: encounter, engage, and reflect.

age populations. This paper will reflect on the use of dance as an ethnological tool to introduce various cultures in a style that is informative, exciting, and memorable. A kinesthetic approach reinforces learning objectives (Gardner, 1973) and also relies on the visual and audio components for learning outcomes.

METHOD

Participants

After teaching dance for about 20 years, I developed a pretty solid format for working with movement concepts for children, especially preschool through elementary education. This proved invaluable as I went into the inner-city schools in Chicago for the first time to work with primarily African-American and Hispanic children. Building a good rapport with the classroom teacher was imperative; often, this was done by introducing myself and empowering (Gardner, 1983) him/her by asking for help with classroom management. This approach usually motivated the teacher to take an active part in the dance program. Classroom teachers' involvement in the educational program serves as a great motivator for students to become pro-active in the dance. Secondly, my initial introduction to students was strong and

assertive. I always took the preference to introduce myself, my multicultural name, and its national origin. Students took great delight in pronouncing my name, both in English and in Polish. This helped keep them curious, stimulated, and engaged. Next, boundaries were set. Spelled out were three simple rules:

1. No talking when the teachers are talking.
2. When my hand is raised, they are to stop all movement and noise and freeze. We would practice this a few times amidst giggles and lots of fun. Students took further initiative to challenge themselves to be the first one to freeze.
3. We will abide by the Golden Rule – i.e., treat others the way we want to be treated (The NIV Study Bible). Pushing, shoving, rudeness, etc. would not be tolerated.

I made sure these rules were adhered to throughout the class and enforced them without favoritism. In particularly difficult classroom where behavior challenges were a real adversary to learning, I empowered (Gardner, 1983) the most behaviorally challenged students by making them student assistants. Their job was to help manage their classmates according to the three rules above, and this always worked beautifully. I think it gave them a sense of pride to have a responsible task, which they took seriously and executed proficiently.

Design and Procedure

Next, I divided the class plan into three areas: introduction, activity, and reinforcement. The remainder of this paper will discuss these areas.

1. Introduction. The introduction used strong visual aids such as pictures, personal photographs, and world map. All of this reinforces the selected subject area topic and gives deeper meaning to the dance experience. The name of the dance, usually in its ethnic language, was printed on the board and we located the area/country on a world map. One note here: I received criticism from the teachers and principal of one of the Chicago schools in regard to showing a world map to inner-city, at-risk minority school children. This was an upscale older Jewish neighborhood that bussed minority Hispanic students into the school due to the low local enrollments. They felt that at-risk children could not possibly be expected to know where certain locations were on a map. True, in the seven years that I taught in the inner city reaching thousands of children, most of my K-8 students couldn't locate a particular country/culture. They couldn't even find their own home town of Chicago, much less the United States, on a world map! I decided it was time to educate them geographically

and raise their levels of curiosity about various other parts of the world that humans share. I felt that raising the standard would produce excellence rather than assuming that inner-city kids or at-risk children couldn't be educated, which is what the school was stating. Their attitude is unfortunate and shocking. All children have a right to education in its fullest extent, no matter what the socioeconomic factors happen to be. At the time, I questioned whether these school personnel had low expectations of these children based on their inner-city low socioeconomic status or even Hispanic background. Low academic teacher expectations will lead to poor academic results. Raise the standard and lead them upward to achieve it.

In addition to using a world map, pictures and sometimes my own personal photographs of the culture and/or its people were viewed. Visual aids are important as they add to the meaning and reinforce the dance outcomes (Ross, 2000). Students loved viewing them, and brief explanations were always given. These pictures showed housing, school children, village life, markets, scenery, etc. which were integral to and uniquely defined by the culture. The students particularly liked seeing my personal travel photos to various places, especially if my husband was in the picture! I think

that when a window was opened into my own life and an invitation extended to them to view, they felt more accepting of human vulnerabilities, including their own, resulting in model student classroom behavior. They now had a personal connection with me. I also interspersed the dance activity section with viewing more pictures, which will be discussed below.

2. Activity. The activity section involved teaching the actual dance. If I were in the same classroom for more than one day, I would always warm-up the students by repeating the dance from the previous class. This also served as a great way to review, which culminates into a fantastic reinforcement instructional tool. Another instructional technique that I developed over the years was to construct the class with HIGH LEVEL and low level activity. This helped to maintain the focus of the children, especially when working with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), cocaine-addicted infants, and otherwise low retention rate students. The basic rule of thumb: give a high-level activity, work out their excess energy, and then they're ready to settle down to low-level work such as viewing another picture, hearing a brief story pertinent to the next step, breaking down the next movement, etc.

When the actual dance steps were taught, each step was carefully broken down to the appropriate age level. The name of each step was written on the board, usually in its ethnic form. The children were asked to pronounce and repeat it (the kids loved learning vocabulary in another language!). When learning and performing each step, I was adamant that students either verbally say the counts or rhythmically say the name of the step as they are doing it. My reasoning was two-fold: 1. For reinforcement; and 2. For better classroom management. They tended to behave better and not get into so much trouble if their minds were focused on doing AND saying the step. Praise was given only when it was merited. Children know if they're doing a good job, so don't lie by telling them they are when they aren't. One only diminishes one's authority and integrity. Encourage them, but be honest. It helps foster trust between you and your students which enhances the educational objective.

The dance activity was interspersed with stories or interesting facts from that particular culture and sometimes more pictures were shown (high vs. low activity). For instance, when teaching the African-Caribbean-Brazilian dance, children learned about life in a small tribal village in western Africa and how it

produced the distinctive music and dance forms indigenous to that group. When some of them were enslaved and brought to the Americas, those forms came with them but blended with both native American and European forms to birth the unique style of music and dance (Lidster and Tamburini, 1965) that they were learning. This gave deeper meaning to the movement experience.

After all the steps were learned, the entire dance was done to the music. We would practice this a few times, and the children would take pride in the ownership of successfully completing a task that was well done. Often times, the classroom teachers would be amazed that this could be accomplished in such a short amount of time (usually one hour). After this, they were now ready for the final section of the class: the reinforcement of the day's learning experience.

3. Reinforcement. Reinforcement is nothing more than telling them what they have just learned. I wanted to make that fun as well as interesting and educational. So, a game based on the TV game show, *Jeopardy*, was developed. Most of the students were familiar with this show. The class was split into two arbitrary groups and given an ethnic team name, usually the name of one of the steps. I then would proceed with asking one question to the

first team. If they were correct in their response, they would get one point. Score was kept on the board for all to see. Questions took on many different forms. I particularly liked to ask to see a certain step done in class that day, but other questions centered around the pictures/photos seen, map questions, and stories about the culture. This tested their understanding in a format that was fun, educational, but not threatening or embarrassing.

Lastly, it was time to declare the winner. Mindful to remove the competitive edge that can impair self-esteem and learning (Gardner, 1983) in general, I proceeded in the following manner. First, each team's points were tallied, but mentioned that just because one team had more points than the other didn't necessarily indicate that a particular team won. It was mentioned that learners are winners, and they were asked to raise the hands of those students who learned something from the day's dance class. With their little hands raised, noted and praised were those who learned something from the dance experience. Those that didn't raise their hands were addressed that it was unfortunate that they didn't learn anything today. Those "learners" were then declared the winners (more hands would usually pop up!), and class was

over. Saying "Good-bye" was expressed in the native language of the national dance for that day.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

This methodology is multicultural and can be applied across the board to various minority populations with a minimum of adjustments. Both multicultural and creative movement were taught in several Chicago public and private schools each week over a period of seven years. Approximately 55,000 – 60,000 inner-city, at-risk minority students ages pre-K through grade 8 were reached. Most of the experiences took place in the classroom; some culminated in school/community performances. Since dance is a performing art, these latter schools always had my support and help if a performance was scheduled. A field trip to Chicago's world-famous Field Museum was always included and conducted by the dance artist. Walking through the many world cultural exhibits and experiencing them visually, auditorially, and kinetically reinforced strongly the dance material quite well.

The arts experience given to the children was very successful. It was always well received by parents, teachers, and students; was educational; fun; and fulfilling and rewarding to the

students. This methodology worked successfully with all multicultural groups worked with, as Chicago's school population is reflective of students from almost every culture world-wide. Where language was a barrier, movement was the means of communication. Consistency with discipline and praise were maintained which are protocols for dance. Students learned, actively engaged themselves in the movement, and reflected upon their dance learning outcomes in a fun manner. Teachers were then able to use this newly-acquired information to springboard into and interface with other subjects, such as music, reading, social studies, math, writing, etc (Bloomfield and Childs, 2000). The possibilities were unlimited and were unbound by using one's creative intellect and imagination.

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TABLE
TEACHING MULTICULTURAL DANCE ARTS TO K - 4 CHILDREN

I. INTRODUCTION OR "ENCOUNTER"

- Tell them what they're going to learn
- Show visual aids
  - Map: locate country
    locate where we live
- Show pictures/visual aids
- Explain unique aspects of culture that make it distinct

II. Actively "Engage" – Learn the Dance!

- Break down movement to make it developmentally appropriate
- SIMPLIFY both steps and rhythm!
- If rhythm is tricky, have students clap it first, then clap with music, then dance it—maybe even sing or hum it

III. "Reflect" – Tell them What They've Learned

- Game Time!
  - Reinforce what was learned
  - Solid but fun review of learning experience
  - Remove competitive edge—"learners are winners"

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